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Ex-GI Bragged He Was Assassin For Foreigners

John Dutcher is a member of the notorious Terpil-Wilson gang of international gunrunners and cut-throats, an aggregation of former CIA and military men who have sold their services to some of the world's sleaziest dictators. So far, Dutcher has escaped the spotlight, but it's time he was exposed to public scrutiny.

Dutcher is a rugged, 6-foot, 40-year-old ex-Marine who has been described by associates as a dangerous man. He once bragged to New York undercover detectives that he had been a hired assassin for foreign governments.

How much of this was true and how much simply braggadocio is not certain. In any case, an unsubstantiated confession of crimes overseas is not enough to hang a man in this country, and Dutcher in fact is not wanted for any violation of American laws.

What little is known about Dutcher comes from law enforcement officials, secret Justice Department files and interviews with his former associates. I have a personal interest in him: An inside source told me Dutcher may have some link to, or

knowledge of, an alleged hit list that includes the name of my associate Dale Van Atta, who has been investigating the Terpil-Wilson operation for almost a year now.

An episode in the summer of 1979 illustrates both the equivocal nature and deadly potential of Dutcher's activities. He and another man were hired to bring two Ecuadorians back to the United States, dead or alive. The hit men's employer was a bail bondsman. According to a reliable source, the two Ecuadorians had been arrested for heroin smuggling and had jumped bail of \$100,000 apiece.

Dutcher and his associate spent two months in Ecuador and reportedly came back with two death certificates attesting to the fugitives' demise, as well as news articles indicating the pair may have been blown up in a car. But there is reason to believe that the two Ecuadorian bail-jumpers are still alive and that Dutcher succeeded in conning his employer.

Dutcher's association with Frank Terpil and Ed Wilson apparently dates to early 1978, when he was recruited as part of a team that would teach the dark arts to Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi's personal guards and terrorists. According to secret government files, Dutcher and four other American mercenaries flew to Libya in February, 1978.

Dutcher returned from Libya in

May and went to work for one of Wilson's Virginia corporations, according to statements he made later to undercover operatives in New York.

The only time Dutcher's name surfaced in print was in The New York Times of Dec. 24, 1979. In a story on the arrest of Terpil and another associate, the Times reported: "A third man, John Dutcher, whom [the district attorney] called a 'self-proclaimed assassin,' was also arrested at the Hilton and held as a material witness."

Though Terpil and the other man were charged and eventually convicted, Dutcher was released. Terpil fled from the country.